

Testimony of the Center for Women and Families of Eastern Fairfield County
In Support of HB 5548, Law Enforcement Response to Family Violence

Samantha Bayuk, Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Advocate

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Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and honorable members of the Committee, my name is Samantha Bayuk and I am a Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Advocate at the Center for Women and Families of Eastern Fairfield County (CWFEFC). CWFEFC is a Bridgeport based domestic violence and sexual assault crisis agency that serves the towns of Bridgeport, Easton, Fairfield, Monroe, Stratford and Trumbull. The family violence court advocates saw around 3000 clients in 2011, while CWF as whole saw a total of 4,606 survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. Advocates provide safety planning, counseling, and referrals as well as advocacy for victims of domestic violence. We are in support of the 5548 Bill. The provisions contained within will provide additional protection for victims and survivors of domestic violence.

When perpetrators are on probation, victims are under the impression that compliance with probation, on the perpetrator's behalf, is not limited to compliance with the law, but also includes attending their recommended intervention or treatment programs. If the perpetrator violates their probation, either by not complying with the law, or not attending their recommended classes, however, the probation officer of the perpetrator should then make a reasonable effort to contact the victim, especially in the case of domestic violence. This is important information for the victim to have, so that they can utilize said information in order to safety plan, as well as make any changes necessary to help protect them from the perpetrator.

There are a number of reasons why this information is pertinent to a victim's safety. One of the reasons, to start, is that in a case where the perpetrator's violence is escalating, notifying the victim allows him or her to plan accordingly to do things such as find shelter or a place to stay where the perpetrator cannot find him or her. Another reason it is important to the safety of a victim is that if the perpetrator is not complying with treatment programs, specifically domestic violence batterer treatment or substance abuse intervention, then their behaviors, most likely, have not changed their behaviors. If this is the case, it could often lead to stalking, threats of violence, or unfortunately, what many abusers call "coming back to finish the job," wherein victims end up battered worse, or in the worst case, dead. A third reason that informing the victim of any probation violation is important, is that continual violations of mandated programs, restraining orders, or other sentences not only exhibits an obvious disregard for court orders, but also a disregard for the safety and comfort of the victim, which can be a red flag for their security not only out in the community, but at home as well if the perpetrator knows where they reside. The blatant disregard for court orders and the victim's feelings can also show that the perpetrator is not trying to change their aggressive, often times

intimidating, behaviors, and means that they could still exhibit and hold aggression toward the victim, and may even plan to act on it. The more information the victim knows regarding the abuser's whereabouts, probation, and other details of their case, the better prepared he or she can be for potential violence, and the better he or she can prepare to protect themselves or even hide away from the abuser.

Notification of case status is extremely important in terms of victim safety. A provision in Bill 5548 is for the victim notification of cases that are nolleed or dismissed. In cases where there are protective orders in place the protective order expires when the case is disposed of. Victims need time to prepare for this and to be able to safety plan in regards to a protective order expiring. Another reason why notification is important is because there are defendants who are not abusing their partners just because a criminal case is pending. Once the case is disposed of there may be a risk of violence occurring again and victims need to be prepared and be able to make informed decisions. The criminal justice system is hard to navigate and it will be beneficial for victims to be more informed of case status.

Bill 5548 is an important step in providing victims of domestic violence with added safety measures, as well as additional information regarding the abuser's case. Thank you for considering this important piece of legislation. It is our hope, here at The Center for Women and Families of Eastern Fairfield County, that you will join us in supporting HB 5301.

Samantha Bayuk
Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Advocate
The Center for Women and Families of Eastern Fairfield County
Phone: (203) 334-6153 Extension 32
E-Mail: sbayuk@cwfejc.org